

Red Willow Reservoir

2009 Fall Survey Summary



Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

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The following text and graphs are the result of netting surveys completed during 2009 at Red Willow Reservoir. For comparative purposes, results from previous years are also shown. Fish populations are sampled each fall at Red Willow using gill nets, a method commonly used to sample fish found primarily in open water, such as walleye, white bass, channel catfish and wipers. The graphs show the total number of fish caught per net and the relative abundance of fish within several length categories as well as annual mean elevation and storage capacity. The text provides a brief explanation of the information shown in the graphs.

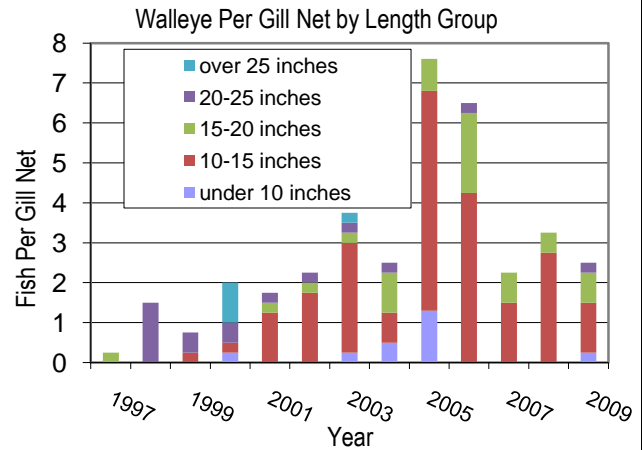
Red Willow will be experiencing a prolonged period of low water due to dam repairs beginning November 2009. Currently water is being released and the reservoir will be held somewhere between 2552-54 feet above msl. This will be a drop of approximately 25 feet. The releases were made due to dam safety issues and will most likely remain low until repairs are completed. At this elevation the reservoir will be approximately 550 surface acres and 5185 acre feet. Most likely, the fishery will be negatively impacted but biologists are unsure what the exact outcome will be. Access to the lake will be severely decreased due to the lack of low water boat ramps. It is uncertain how long to expect low water conditions to last.

Wiper populations were strong at Red Willow and would provide good angling opportunities for those in search of trophy fish. Wipers continue to be a priority species at Red Willow due to past success and popularity with anglers. Normally wipers are stocked annually, but were not stocked in 2009 due to shortages in the numbers of fish available for stocking. Currently, biologists are planning to request wipers for the 2010 season but at a reduced rate due to low water. Walleye catch rates have been less the last couple of years but anglers are still having success. Catfish numbers are also good with moderate numbers and size structure. White bass numbers were down in the '09 survey but this is most likely due to bad weather and low water temperatures at the time of survey. Red Willow also has a strong pike population with fish up to 30 inches. NGPC has been stocking pike every third year and those fish are growing nicely. The "Willow" also has seen an increase in crappie numbers due to recent high water events and the newly flooded brush.

Red Willow may be a hot spot for ice fishing due to concentration of fish as a result of the current drawdowns. Species of interest would most likely be panfish and walleye but don't overlook the possibility of catching other gamefish through the ice

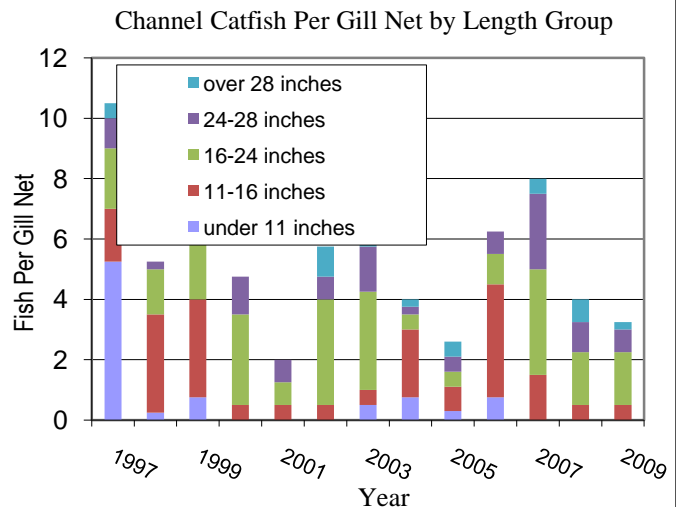
Walleye

Catch rates of walleye in 2009 were less compared to catch rates in '05 and '06. Although numbers appear to be down they are comparable to past years and are close to the ten year average. Approximately two-thirds of fish sampled were smaller than the fifteen-inch minimum length limit. There were a few fish sampled that were greater than 20 inches. Red Willow receives annual walleye stockings in order to augment natural reproduction and maintain a fishable population of walleye. The future of the fishery and management options is uncertain at this time due to emergency drawdowns.



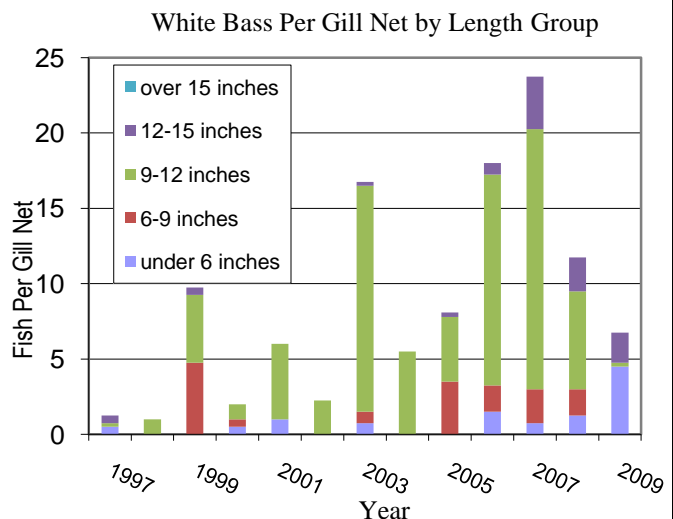
Channel Catfish

Channel catfish numbers have been stable for the last couple years but are less compared to catch rates in '06-'07. Water temperatures were significantly lower this year during surveys which may have adversely impacted catch rates. Size structure is weighted toward larger fish with most fish > 16 inches. Catfish are stocked regularly to maintain fishable populations. Currently Red Willow is scheduled to receive catfish in 2010 but emergency drawdowns could lead to changes in management plans



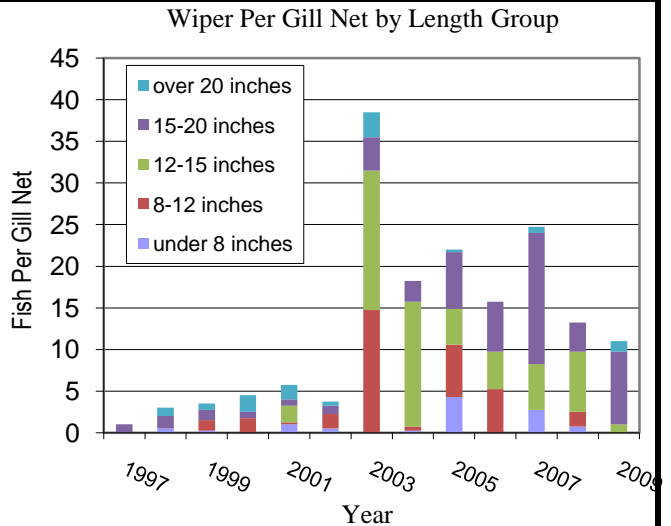
White Bass

White bass numbers have been relatively high at Red Willow since 2006. Numbers were down a bit in 2009, but this may be due to cold water temperatures during the survey. Catch rates were 6 fish per net and there were very few medium sized fish sampled. Wipers are a priority species at Red Willow but white bass will be stocked if numbers do not improve. As with other species the effects of emergency drawdowns is uncertain.

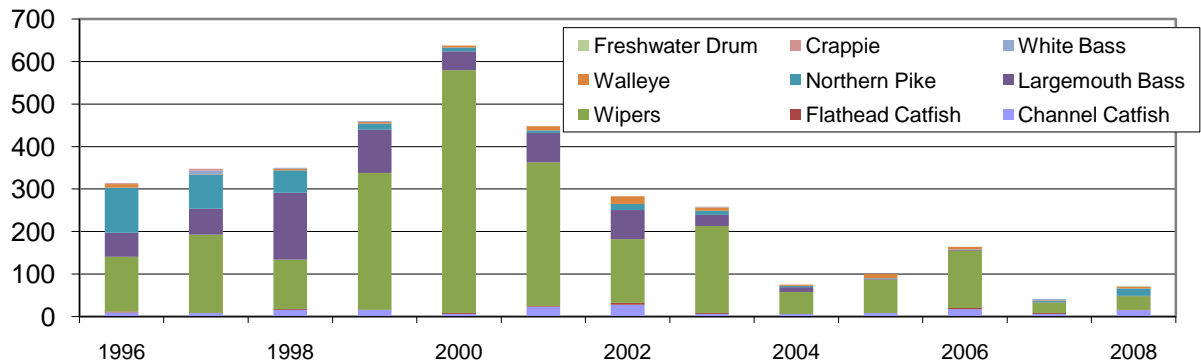


Wipers

Red Willow is the best wiper lake of the four southwest reservoirs. Numbers have been strong with a lot of fish over 15 inches. The numbers in 2008 are down a bit but there are still plenty of fish and good numbers of large fish available. Red Willow is stocked with wipers annually and is scheduled to receive fish in 2010 depending on water levels.

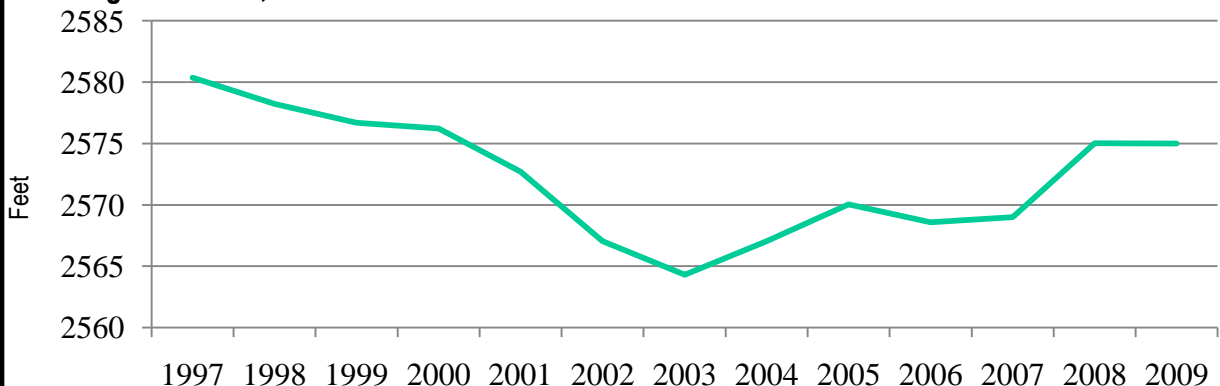


Master Angler Awards, Red Willow Reservoir 1994-2008 (2009 data not yet available)

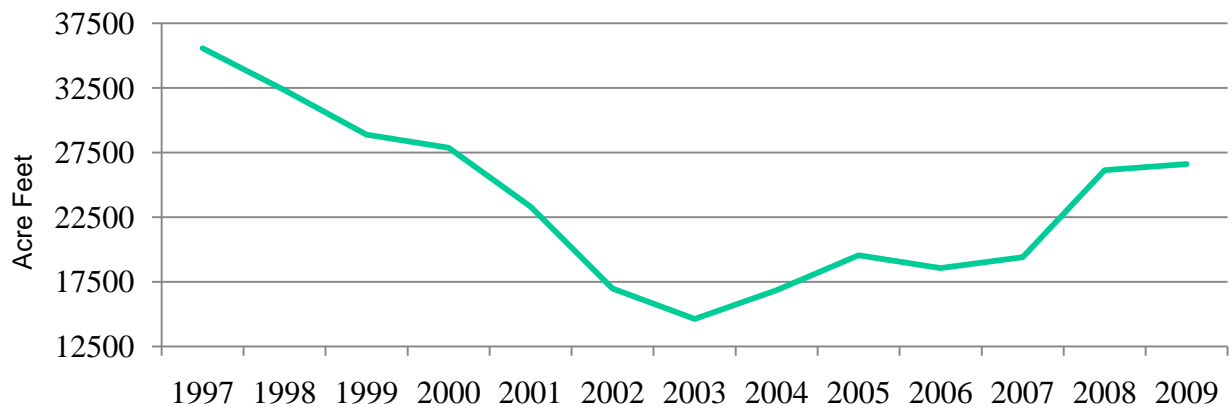


While the numbers of M.A. awards given may not necessarily represent the true number of large fish caught (but not reported), the information is useful for evaluating catch trends of trophy fish. In 2008, there were 15 channel catfish, 32 wipers, 1 largemouth bass, 17 northern pike, and 4 walleye reported as master angler fish.

Average Elevation, Red Willow Reservoir 1996-2007



Average Yearly Storage, Red Willow Reservoir 1996-2007

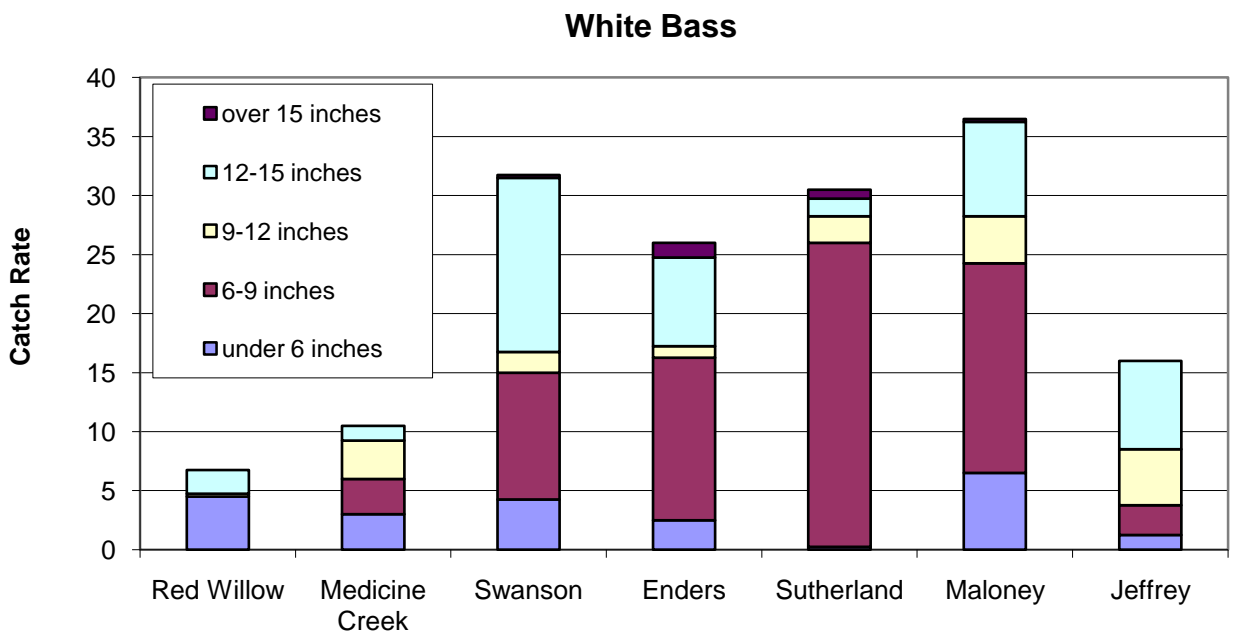
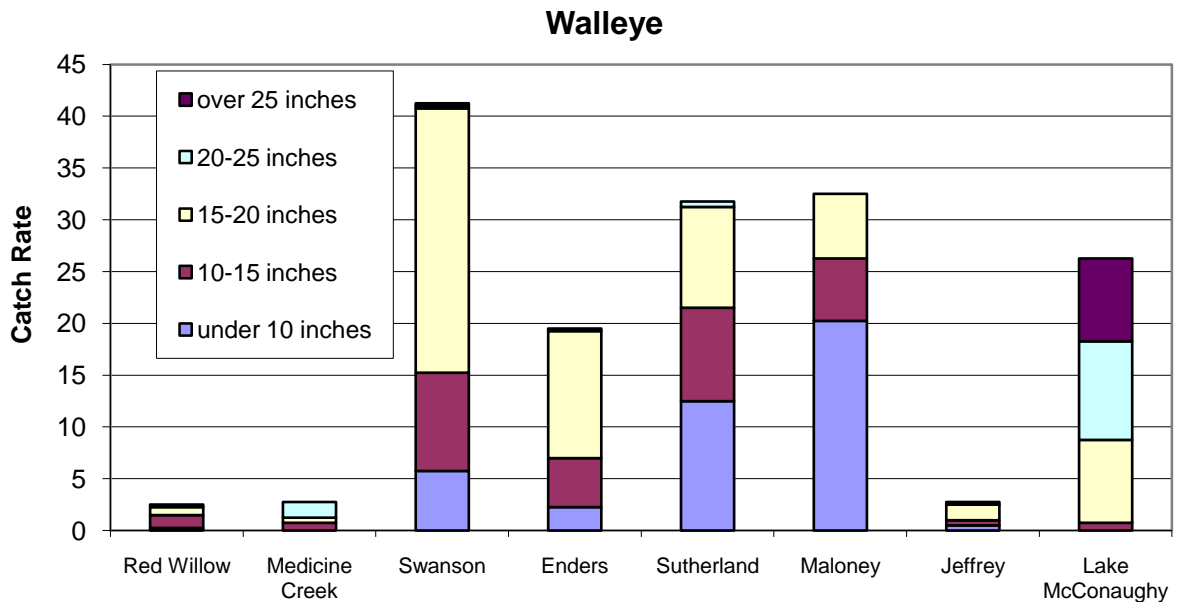


Aerial photo of Red Willow Reservoir taken 2-16-2010

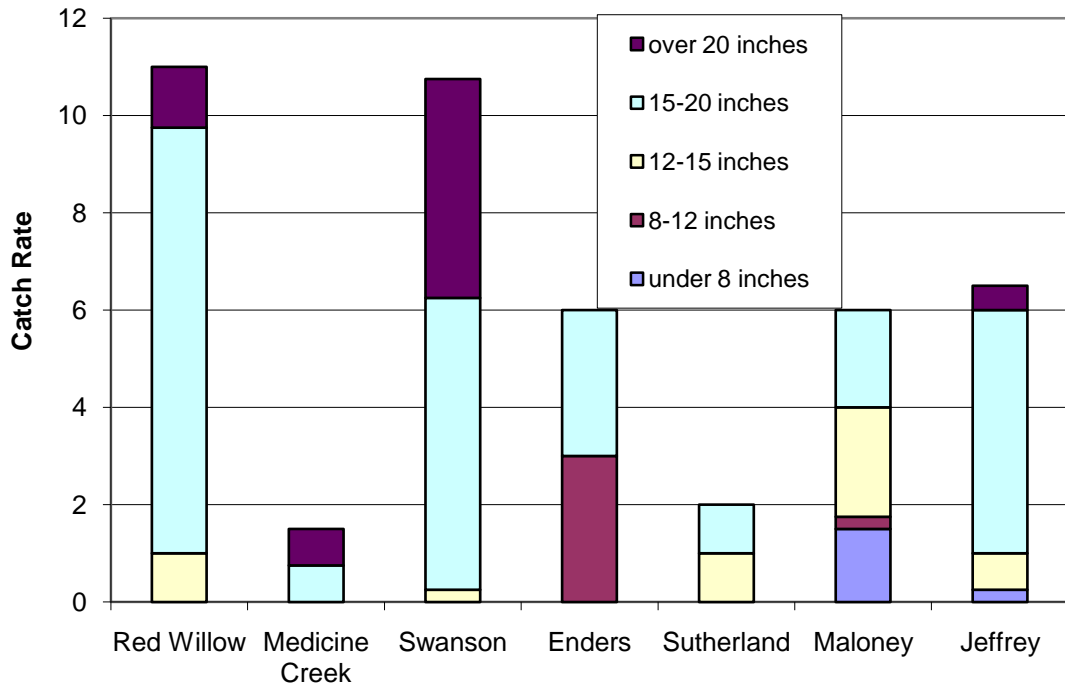
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The following graphs compare 2009 walleye, white bass, wiper and channel catfish gill net catch rates between Southwest District reservoirs.



Wiper



Channel catfish

